CAREER KIT

Kindergarten Teacher Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

How to Become a Kindergarten Teacher

2026-11 edition

Inside: at-a-glance summary · step-by-step path · costs & requirements · 90-day action plan · documents checklist · exams · interview questions · resume bullets · common mistakes · 13-week tracker · resources

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SECTION 1

At a glance

To teach kindergarten in a US public school you need a bachelor's degree, a completed teacher preparation program with student teaching, passing scores on your state's required tests, and a state teaching license. That usually takes four years, or one to two extra years if you already hold a degree in another field, and tuition is the main cost. Kindergarten teachers earned a median of $62,680 in May 2025 (BLS), while overall growth for kindergarten and elementary teachers is projected at 0% through 2035, with about 99,400 openings a year to replace people who leave.

Timeline	4 years (bachelor's with teacher prep); 1–2 years more if you already have a degree
Typical cost	$20,000–$120,000 in tuition, plus $300–$1,000 in exam and license fees
Education	Bachelor's degree with an approved teacher preparation program
License	State teaching license (varies by state); private schools often do not require one
Median pay	$62,680 per year (kindergarten teachers, BLS May 2025)
Job outlook	0% (2025–35), about 99,400 openings a year from turnover

SECTION 2

Step-by-step path

1. Check your state's teacher licensing rules

Time: 1–2 weeks

Licensing is run by each state's department of education. Look up the license that covers kindergarten, which may be labeled early childhood (PreK-3), elementary (K-6) or multi-subject, and note the required degree, GPA, tests and background check. This tells you which programs and exams to target.

2. Earn a bachelor's degree in education or a related field

Time: 4 years · Cost: $20,000–$120,000

Most future kindergarten teachers major in early childhood education or elementary education, which builds the teacher preparation program into the degree. If your degree is in another subject, you can enter a post-baccalaureate or master's licensure program instead. Choose a program approved by your state, since only approved programs lead to a license.

3. Complete student teaching and field experience

Time: 12–16 weeks · Cost: Often $0 (some programs charge a placement or supervision fee)

Programs include a semester-long student teaching placement in a classroom with a mentor teacher, plus earlier observation hours. Ask for a kindergarten or early grades placement so your experience matches the grade you want. BLS lists a student teaching program among the typical licensing requirements.

4. Pass your state's required tests

Time: 2–3 months of prep · Cost: $150–$400

Most states use the Praxis series: a basic skills test such as Praxis Core (or a GPA or ACT/SAT waiver) and a content test such as Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects (5001). ETS lists the combined 5001 test at about $180. A few states use their own exams, such as the CBEST and CSET in California or the TExES in Texas. Use the test your state names.

5. Pass a background check and apply for the license

Time: 4–8 weeks · Cost: $100–$300

Submit fingerprints, transcripts, test scores and the application fee to your state education department. Processing can take several weeks. Some states issue an initial license that you upgrade after a few years of teaching and professional development.

6. Apply for kindergarten teaching jobs

Time: 2–4 months

Hiring peaks from spring through summer. Apply to several districts, including charter and private schools. Prepare a short portfolio with a lesson plan, a classroom management approach and your student teaching evaluation. Substitute or paraprofessional roles can get you into a building while you wait.

7. Add endorsements and keep your license current

Time: Ongoing

Endorsements in ESL, special education or reading raise your marketability and sometimes pay. Meet your state's renewal requirements, usually professional development hours every few years.

SECTION 3

Costs & requirements

Estimated costs (USD)

Item	Low	High	Note
Bachelor's degree tuition	$20,000	$120,000	Public in-state colleges are cheapest; community college transfer lowers cost.
Alternative or post-bacc licensure program	$5,000	$30,000	For people who already have a degree; some alternative programs let you earn a salary while you complete them.
Praxis Elementary Education (5001) and related tests	$150	$400	ETS lists $180 for the combined 5001 test; add a basic skills test if your state requires it.
Fingerprinting and background check	$40	$100	
License application fee	$50	$200	Varies by state.
Student teaching expenses (travel, supplies)	$0	$1,000	
Test prep materials	$0	$200	
Total	**$25,240**	**$151,900**	

Requirements

Education	A bachelor's degree is the typical entry requirement for public school teachers, with an approved teacher preparation program.
Student teaching	A supervised classroom placement, usually a full semester. BLS lists completing a student teaching program as a standard licensing step.
State tests	A general teaching skills test and a subject knowledge test. Many states use Praxis; others use their own exams.
State license	All states require public school teachers to be licensed for the grade level they teach. Private school teachers typically do not need a license.
Background check	Fingerprint-based checks are standard before you can be in a classroom.
Minimum GPA	Many programs and states set a minimum GPA, commonly around 2.5 to 3.0.
Health screening	Some states or districts require a TB test or proof of immunizations.
Skills	Patience, classroom management for 5- and 6-year-olds, and ability to teach early reading and math.

SECTION 4

90-Day Action Plan

Tick each box as you finish the task. Do the phases in order; it is fine if a phase takes a little longer.

Phase 1: Pick your route

Days 1–30

Goal: Match your background to a licensing route.

- ☐ Find your state education department's license page for PreK-3 or elementary teachers.
- ☐ List approved programs and compare cost, format and student teaching placement.
- ☐ Check whether you need a basic skills test or can use SAT/ACT/GPA instead.
- ☐ Volunteer or substitute in a kindergarten classroom for 20 hours.
- ☐ Request transcripts to see which credits transfer.

Phase 2: Enroll and prepare for exams

Days 31–60

Goal: Start your program and begin test prep.

- ☐ Apply and complete FAFSA and any teacher loan forgiveness paperwork.
- ☐ Download the study companion for your state exam.
- ☐ Take a diagnostic practice test.
- ☐ Build a study schedule of 5 hours a week.
- ☐ Observe a kindergarten teacher and write notes on routines and transitions.

Phase 3: Build your teaching portfolio

Days 61–90

Goal: Prepare materials for student teaching and job applications.

- ☐ Draft two sample kindergarten lesson plans (early literacy and math).
- ☐ Write your classroom management philosophy in one page.
- ☐ Ask a mentor teacher for a reference.
- ☐ Register for your test date.
- ☐ Create a list of target districts and their hiring calendars.

SECTION 5

Documents checklist

Gather these early. Keep originals in one folder and scans in the cloud.

- [ ] College transcripts
- [ ] Praxis or state test score reports
- [ ] Student teaching evaluations
- [ ] Fingerprint and background check clearance
- [ ] Resume and teaching portfolio
- [ ] Letters of recommendation

SECTION 6

Exams & how to prepare

Praxis Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects (5001)

What it is: A content test covering reading and language arts, mathematics, social studies and science, which many states require for elementary and kindergarten licensure. It can be taken as a combined test or by subtest.

How to prepare: Use ETS's free study companion and take a full practice test; review early literacy and math concepts.

Praxis Core Academic Skills (or state basic skills test)

What it is: Reading, writing and math skills tests required for admission or licensure in some states; others accept SAT, ACT or GPA instead.

How to prepare: Check whether your program or state waives it before you register.

State-specific exams (e.g., TExES, CBEST/CSET, FTCE)

What it is: Some states run their own test suites for elementary or early childhood licensure.

How to prepare: Use your state's official prep guide.

Performance assessment (edTPA or similar)

What it is: A portfolio of lesson plans, video and reflections from your student teaching required by some states.

How to prepare: Start collecting artifacts early in your student teaching.

SECTION 7

Interview questions

1. Why do you want to teach kindergarten?

Tip: Use a concrete story about helping a young child learn.

2. How do you teach early reading?

Tip: Mention phonemic awareness, phonics and read-alouds.

3. How do you manage a class of 5-year-olds?

Tip: Describe routines, clear expectations and positive reinforcement.

4. How do you handle a child who cries at drop-off?

Tip: Show empathy and partnership with parents.

5. How do you differentiate for students at different levels?

Tip: Give a small-group example.

6. How do you communicate with families?

Tip: Mention regular updates and translation when needed.

7. What does play-based learning mean to you?

Tip: Link play to specific learning goals.

8. How would you handle a behavior challenge?

Tip: Stay calm, find triggers, involve the team.

9. How do you assess kindergarten readiness?

Tip: Mention observation, simple checklists and screening tools.

10. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Tip: Mention growth such as endorsements.

SECTION 8

Resume bullet examples

Adapt these to what you actually did. Use numbers wherever you can.

- Led small-group reading lessons for 6 students, improving letter-sound recognition by 20% over 10 weeks.
- Planned and taught 40+ lessons during a 14-week student teaching placement.
- Built a classroom routine system that cut transition time by 3 minutes per day.
- Communicated weekly with families of 22 students via newsletter and conferences.
- Created math centers using manipulatives for counting and shapes.
- Completed fingerprint clearance and mandated reporter training.

SECTION 9

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Enrolling in a program that your state does not approve for licensure.
2. Waiting until the last semester to take licensing exams.
3. Skipping a kindergarten student teaching placement.
4. Not tracking license renewal deadlines.
5. Applying only to one district.

SECTION 10

13-week progress tracker

Fill this in by hand each week.

Week	Focus	Done?	Notes
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

SECTION 11

Resources, salary & disclaimer

Resources

- **BLS: Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers**

https://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/kindergarten-and-elementary-school-teachers.htm

- **ETS Praxis**

https://praxis.ets.org/

- **CareerOneStop licenses by state**

https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-licensed-occupations.aspx

Salary

Bottom 10%	Median	Top 10%
$46,990	**$62,680 per year (kindergarten teachers, except special education)**	$101,830

Outlook: BLS projects employment of kindergarten and elementary teachers to be little changed from 2025 to 2035 (a 6,100 job decline), but about 99,400 openings are expected each year as teachers retire or switch careers. Pay varies a lot by state and district; masters degrees and years of service move you up the district salary scale.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, May 2025 data — https://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/kindergarten-and-elementary-school-teachers.htm

Disclaimer. Requirements vary by state and change over time. Verify with the official sources listed. This guide is not legal or career advice.