



CAREER PATHWAYS IN EDUCATION:

Using Your Foreign Education
in the United States

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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.

Because teaching usually involves obtaining a certificate or license—a process that can be costly and time-consuming—it is especially important to fully consider your options.

This guide will help you to explore career pathways related to the field of education, as well as alternative careers that use your skills but may not require a license. You will also find useful resources to guide you as you plan for your future.

The Pathways Guide at a Glance

If you have completed your education in another country and are now starting your career in the United States, you will need to understand to what extent you meet the academic requirements of your chosen career.

- The **Gaining Recognition for Your Foreign Education** section (page 10) explains how to determine the U.S. equivalency of your foreign degree to help you explore career pathways in education and other fields.
- The **Educational Pathways in the Field of Education** section (page 13) provides examples of careers in education that may match your qualifications.
- The **Licensing and Certification Requirements in Education** section (page 20) explains the teaching licensing and certification processes in the U.S., with additional resources and information on alternative routes to certification.
- Not all internationally trained educators decide to pursue a teaching license in the United States, 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 (page 23).

Let's get started!

Strategies for Success

Ask Lots of Questions

Although you may have a strong idea of what your career will be in the United States based on the professional experience you already have, establishing yourself in a new country is a chance to reach new goals and possibilities. Analyzing your career options in the U.S. can be challenging, but by remaining flexible you can use the education and experience you already have to take steps to succeed.

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 goal?
- Who can I talk to about my options?

Make a Plan

After you've explored some of the career options available to you in the United States, 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** (page 27) to guide you as you outline your plan.*

Take Initiative

Although your **academic and professional credentials** are very important to your professional success, so are skills like your communication style, English language level, and ability to adapt to U.S. workplace culture. **Networking** with fellow educators in your community, meeting policy makers and district administrators by attending local school board meetings, attending educational-based conferences or Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and volunteering in a local school are great ways to expand your understanding of the field, improve your skills, and grow your network in the U.S.

Finding meaningful work as an immigrant can take time and you may face challenging obstacles. Although many factors are out of your control, try to remain flexible, be persistent, and take initiative. As you explore this guide, you will find a number of helpful resources to support you.

GLOSSARY

Academic and professional credential: The degree, diploma, or license that you receive when you complete a program, pass examinations, or meet a set of requirements.

Networking: Interacting with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career.

YOUR CAREER PATHWAY IN THE UNITED STATES

Like many immigrants, you may initially struggle to gain entry into your professional field in the U.S. Although you may have adequate knowledge or experience, the challenge often occurs 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 decisions that will open doors to new opportunities. Education and training are the building blocks of your career—with the skills you acquire, 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 is required for entry into the field. In the United States, specific authorities or regulatory bodies are responsible for recognizing professional credentials required for state licensing. Because the time and cost associated with licensing varies by state, contact the relevant regulatory body before deciding to proceed with licensing. In this guide, careers usually requiring licensure are clearly marked, but again, this varies from state to state.

Understanding Non-Regulated Professions

Some occupations in the United States are either internally regulated by professional associations, or are entirely non-regulated. However, although less strict than **regulated professions**, certain standards of professional practice or **designations** might still be preferred by employers and professional associations in non-regulated professions. You can demonstrate that you meet these standards through a certification process linked to training programs provided by employers or community colleges.

GLOSSARY

Career pathway: A series of connected education and training programs that enable individuals to secure a job or advance in an industry or occupation.

Regulated professions: Professions that require a license or certification.

Designation: A title earned by an individual through a certification process.

Can I work as a public school 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 highly regulated. That means that most education occupations in the U.S., including teaching, require either a license or a **teacher certification** to practice.

The teaching license you may have from your home country is generally not valid in the U.S. Internationally trained teachers typically need to meet the same requirements as U.S.-educated teachers.

Note: *In the **state of California**,¹ foreign-trained teachers can apply for a Level 1 credential with an overseas license.*

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 United States** section (page 6) of this guide for more information on the different types of schools in the U.S.

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

Many internationally trained professionals decide not to pursue employment in regulated professions due to the challenges of **relicensing**. The education field provides access to less-regulated and non-regulated employment opportunities, often within the private education system, government agencies, and training and development companies; as well as with education service providers, such as publishers, tutoring services, and educational software developers.

If you decide against relicensing as a teacher in the United States, you can still work in the education field in a non-regulated occupation. Some related careers are discussed in the **Transferable Skills and Using Them in Related or Alternative Careers** section (page 23) of this guide.

GLOSSARY

Teacher Certification: The process by which new teachers are licensed to teach in a given area after completing required coursework, degrees, tests, and other specified criteria.

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

THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN THE UNITED STATES

Teaching focuses on educating and guiding students in a variety of settings. Although your experience 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 United States

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

Working Within Public and Private School Systems

Public schools in the U.S. are institutions that receive public funding from the state, local, and federal governments. These schools follow a set of rules developed by either the city's school district and/or 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 or certification in the U.S. if you plan to work in a public school setting.

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

- **Charter schools:**² 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 free from many school district regulations and may enroll students from anywhere in a district.
- **Magnet schools:**³ 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.
- **Urban or rural schools:** located in areas of high need, typically characterized by geographic isolation, population density, or high rates of poverty. In an effort to attract teachers, hiring incentives are common in these underserved areas.

Private schools that do not receive funding from federal, state, or local governments are not bound to public school regulations or curricula. Private schools establish their own criteria for hiring teachers, and generally do not require teachers to be licensed or certified, but may prefer it.

Private schools include:

- **Boarding schools:** students, and sometimes teachers, live on-site during the school term
- **Parochial schools:** primary or secondary schools affiliated with a religious organization
- **Montessori schools and Waldorf schools:** governed by a specific educational philosophy and child-centered approach to learning.

Although a bachelor's degree in education is typically the first step toward work in the field of education, it is not always mandatory depending on the type of teaching you decide to pursue. The type of degree required to teach will vary depending on factors such as location, position, and the type of school you wish to work in.

Because the U.S. education system is administered at the state level, there is no national recognition process for public school teachers.

Because teaching license requirements vary by state, consider these key points:

- All public school teachers must complete a bachelor's degree (or its foreign equivalent) and an accredited teacher preparation program.
- In addition to state certification, most states require internationally trained teachers to be tested for English proficiency.
- You can qualify for teaching jobs without state certification in some private and charter schools.

If you don't meet the requirements of a traditional pathway to teaching, you can consider an alternative pathway to certification or licensing program:

- Most states offer **Alternative/Accelerated Pathways to Teaching Certification**⁴ programs for individuals without a traditional teaching degree from an accredited college or university.
- Some states offer transitional certificates targeted to individuals who are changing careers.

Roles and Responsibilities of Teaching Professionals

Teachers work in classrooms or learning environments with children or adults in a variety of settings, including public or private schools, community colleges, or schools for non-English speakers. A teacher may be required to teach all subjects or be specialized in select subjects.

Early Childhood Education

Preschool teachers work with children aged three to five in a learning centered environment before their mandatory elementary schooling begins. Part of Early Childhood Education, preschool programs are designed to introduce the necessary educational building blocks to children so that they can be better prepared for elementary school. There are various types of **preschools**⁵ to consider.

Primary and Secondary Education

Elementary or primary school education begins in kindergarten. Typically, K-6th 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.

Schools are dynamic places that rely on many different kinds of professionals working together on behalf of the students. Classroom teachers often have additional responsibilities in their schools, such as coaching sports, performing administrative duties, chaperoning field trips, and leading enrichment programs. Special education teachers and school counselors work with students of all levels who have physical, emotional, psychological, or learning disabilities and require special training. Vocational or technical education programs rely on teachers with experience in the trades and technology who can teach practical skills. Parents, volunteers, librarians, and paraprofessionals may also assist teachers in the classroom and provide extra-curricular activities, tutoring, and support.

Secondary school is from grade 6 or 7 to grade 12. Many communities have junior high school or middle school for students in grades 6 through 8 and high school beginning in grade 9. A bachelor's degree with a major in secondary education prepares teachers to work in secondary schools, where they generally concentrate on one or two subject areas.

In most states, education is mandatory to grade 10. Students who drop out of school before achieving a high school diploma can return to school as adults and complete a High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma through a school or community provider.

Postsecondary Education

In the U.S., postsecondary education, also referred to as tertiary education, occurs after high school. It can include: non-degree certificate programs, community colleges (associate degrees), and colleges/universities (bachelor's degrees). Postsecondary education teachers instruct students in a wide variety of academic and vocational subjects. Types of teachers include: college and university faculty, postsecondary career and technical education teachers, and graduate teaching assistants.

Adult and Continuing Education

Adult and continuing education refers to the practice of teaching and educating adults. In contrast to education programs for children and young adults, which are often mandated through legislation, adult education helps adults attain the basic skills they need—including reading, writing, math, English language proficiency, and problem-solving—to be productive workers, family members, and citizens. Adult and continuing education teachers work with adult learners in multiple subjects. They may instruct courses relating to High School Equivalency (HSE), college preparation, or professional development courses oriented toward career training.

In the U.S., **teachers**⁶ 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

Understanding Job Titles

The roles and responsibilities of teachers are highly dependent on areas of expertise and experience. When searching for employment as a teacher you may see job postings with the following titles:

- Kindergarten and elementary school teacher
- Middle school teacher
- High school teacher
- Special education teacher
- English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher
- Adult literacy teacher

Continuing your education and training can open doors for additional certifications and teaching in different settings.

You can read more about academic and professional credentials in the [Educational Pathways in the Field of Education](#) section (page 13) of this guide.

GAINING RECOGNITION FOR YOUR FOREIGN EDUCATION

Your education is the foundation of your career. Although there may be challenges to using your foreign credentials in the United States, you do not have to start over. For an internationally trained professional, exploring career pathways starts with an understanding of the value of the education you received in your home country.

Obtaining a **foreign credential evaluation** is often the first step an immigrant takes to gain access to educational and employment opportunities in the U.S. A credential evaluation helps you gain recognition for your previous studies by considering your country's education system, the status of the institution you attended, its entry and graduation requirements, and the content of the program.



A credential evaluation compares the education you received in your country to a similar degree or diploma in the United States and provides a **degree equivalency**.



In the United States, employers, licensing boards, and universities use credential evaluations to judge the quality and level of your academic achievements in comparison to 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.**
- **Employers and licensing boards refer to credential evaluations to evaluate whether or not you meet their academic requirements.**

Unlike many other countries, the U.S. does not have a national education ministry to evaluate foreign degrees. As a result, some academic institutions and state licensing boards—and many employers—rely on agencies like **World Education Services**⁷ (WES) to examine official documents. Others perform their own evaluations.

The U.S. Department of Education does not evaluate the qualifications of foreign educators; this is the jurisdiction of **state credentialing agencies**.⁸

GLOSSARY

Foreign credential evaluation: An expert analysis of a foreign degree or diploma.

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

Before requesting a credential evaluation from any agency, contact the institution that needs the evaluation to be sure you understand their requirements. These institutions are responsible for the final recognition decision.

If you are exploring a new career, it may be helpful to have an idea of the U.S. equivalency of your foreign credentials.

WES allows you to preview the U.S. equivalency of your highest completed degree by using their **free degree equivalency tool**.⁹

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

Many regulated professions in the U.S. require you to have your foreign degree evaluation conducted by a professional association or preferred provider. If you are applying for a license or certification, always remember to check with your state's licensing board to ensure that a WES evaluation is recognized and accepted. If so, you can apply for a **WES credential evaluation**.¹⁰



Watch the *WES Credential Evaluation & Recognition video*¹¹ **to learn more about credential evaluation.**

Advanced Standing and Transfer Credit

If you are applying to an academic program, you may be eligible for advanced standing or transfer credit for previous education.

- **Advanced standing:** This means you may be allowed to skip prerequisites for admission into a course, or not repeat a required course, reducing the time to complete a degree.
- **Transfer credit:** This means that your previous education is counted toward the total number of credits required for the degree.

For internationally educated individuals, advanced standing and transfer credit is usually determined at the time of application or after admission through a foreign credential evaluation.

Case Study: Elina



Before immigrating to the United States, Elina spent several years in her home country, Kyrgyzstan, as a primary school teacher. With her teaching experience and master's degree in language learning, she assumed that she would easily find work in the U.S. Her limited English skills, however, made it difficult to find a job in her field. After some research, she enrolled in a 12-week English language course, and was able to secure temporary employment through her school as a substitute paraprofessional.

Through her colleagues, Elina learned that there were alternative licensure programs to assist paraprofessionals in becoming licensed teachers. After she finished her English language course, she completed a program specifically designed to transition paraprofessionals to special education teachers. She is now teaching at a private school in Washington for children with special needs.

EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

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

Education is a rewarding field that offers many exciting career options. In this section, you will find some examples of careers in education that you may be qualified for, including their key roles and responsibilities and where further education may be helpful. You will also find information on how to meet the academic requirements for some popular teaching careers.

There are many ways to enter the education field. Some internationally trained teachers gain U.S. experience in entry-level professions as they pursue licensing and certification. Others begin by enrolling in degree programs to gain access to higher level jobs.



HELPFUL TIPS

Research shows that immigrants who add a U.S. degree or certification to their foreign education and training are more likely to progress faster in their careers.



A career pathway is a series of “stackable credentials”—achievements that build on each other based on continuing education, specialization, and certification to allow you to move up a career ladder.

ASSOCIATE
DEGREE

BACHELOR'S
DEGREE

MASTER'S
DEGREE

DOCTORATE
DEGREE

ASSOCIATE DEGREE

Teacher's Assistant,¹² Paraeducator, Paraprofessional, Teacher's Aide

- work under a teacher's supervision while providing students with additional attention and instruction.

Preschool Teacher,¹³ Early Childhood Teacher, Pre-Kindergarten Teacher

- care for children (usually ages 3 to 5) who have not yet entered kindergarten.
- work settings include public and private schools, childcare centers, and charitable organizations.



Some states require preschool teachers to obtain the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential offered by the *Council for Professional Recognition*.¹⁴

Education and training requirements vary based on settings and state regulations. They range from a high school diploma and certification to a college degree.



GO FURTHER

Upgrade your education and skills to qualify for more jobs in the field of education.

BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN EDUCATION (BA ED)

Kindergarten and Elementary School Teacher¹⁵

- teach younger students the basics of subjects such as math and reading
- work in public or private schools



Public school teachers must have a state-issued certificate or license.

Middle School Teacher¹⁶

- help students (grade 6-8) build on the fundamentals they learned in elementary school and prepare them for high school
- work in public or private schools



Public school teachers must have a state-issued certificate or license.

High School Teacher¹⁷

- teach the academics and skills that students will need to attend college or enter the job market after graduation
- work in public or private schools



Public school teachers must have a state-issued certificate or license.

Career and Technical Education Teacher¹⁸

- help middle school, high school, and community college students develop career-related technical skills



Some states require a state-issued certificate or license.

Special Education Teacher¹⁹

- work with students who have a range of learning, psychological, emotional, and physical disabilities
- teach basic skills such as reading, writing, and math, as well as literacy and communication techniques



Public school special education teachers must have a state-issued certificate or license.

Adult Literacy and High School Equivalency Diploma Teacher²⁰

- teach adults basic skills, such as reading, writing, and speaking English



Some states have specific licenses for adult education teachers, whereas others require a public school teacher license (K-12).²¹



GO FURTHER

Upgrade your education and skills to qualify for more jobs in the field of education and teaching. If you are interested in school administration, a master's degree in education or educational leadership is particularly helpful.

MASTER'S DEGREE IN EDUCATION (MA ED)

Elementary, Middle, and High School Principal²²

- manage school operations, such as daily school activities, coordinating curricula, and overseeing teachers and other school staff to provide a safe and productive learning environment



Most states require principals to be licensed as school administrators.

Postsecondary Education College Administrator²³

- oversee student services at colleges and universities

Postsecondary Teacher, Professor, or Faculty²⁴

- instruct students in academic and vocational subjects beyond the high school level
- work in junior or community colleges, and career and vocational schools

MASTER'S DEGREE IN SCHOOL COUNSELING

School and Career Counselor²⁵

- help students develop academic and social skills
- assist with career decisions by helping students develop relevant skills, choose a career, or apply to college
- School counselors work in public and private schools. Career counselors typically work in colleges, government agencies, career centers, and private practices



Public school counselors must have state-issued certificate or license.



GO FURTHER

Upgrade your education and skills to qualify for more jobs in the field of education and teaching. For example, pursue a PhD to qualify for a postsecondary teaching position at a research university.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE (PHD)

Postsecondary Teacher, Professor, or Faculty²⁶

- instruct students in academic and vocational subjects beyond the high school level
- work in public and private colleges and universities

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION DEGREE (EDD)

Senior Academic Administrator,²⁷ College President, Dean

- oversee student services, academics, and faculty research at colleges and universities

Academic Requirements in Education

Consider these academic requirements for careers in the field of education, from entry-level to advanced professions.



Academic requirements for teachers vary based on settings (e.g. public or private institutions) and state regulations. Higher-level teaching generally requires a higher-level degree. However, in areas where there is a shortage of teachers, there may be fewer education requirements. For specific requirements, check with your state board as well as the school you would like to work for.



Requirements for Preschool Teachers

- ✓ Required to have at least an associate degree or its foreign equivalent.

- ✓ Most public schools require teachers to have a bachelor's degree or its foreign equivalent.

- ✓ A Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate is usually required.



Requirements for Kindergarten, Elementary School, Middle School, and High School Teachers

- ✓ Must have at least a bachelor's degree or its foreign equivalent in the relevant field.

- ✓ Most states require completion of an accredited teacher education program.



Requirements for Special Education Teachers

- ✓ Required to have at least a bachelor's degree or its foreign equivalent.
- ✓ Some states require completion of an accredited teacher education program.
- ✓ Some states require a higher level of education, such as a master's degree.



Requirements for Career and Technical Education Teachers

- ✓ Usually require a bachelor's degree or its foreign equivalent.
- ✓ Must have relevant work experience in the specific subject.
- ✓ Occasionally career and technical education teachers are able to work with a high school diploma or an associate degree.



Requirements for Adult Literacy and High School Equivalency Diploma Teachers

- ✓ Usually need a bachelor's degree or its foreign equivalent.
- ✓ Some educational institutions, like community colleges, prefer graduate-level degrees.



Requirements for Postsecondary Teachers, Professors, or Faculty

- ✓ Generally required to have a PhD.
- ✓ Community colleges may hire teachers with a master's degree.
- ✓ Requirements may vary depending on the subject taught.



Requirements for Primary and Secondary School Administrators (Principals)

- ✓ Generally required to have a master's degree or its foreign equivalent.



Requirements for Senior Academic Administrators

- ✓ Generally required to have a PhD or EdD.

U.S. Teacher Education Programs

College or university teacher education programs prepare candidates to meet state requirements for teaching certification.

- Training programs vary depending on the particular state's licensing system.
- In general, teacher education programs include:
 - required coursework for specific subjects and grade levels
 - courses on pedagogy, or methods of teaching
 - supervised teaching experience
- **Teach.org**²⁸ provides information on teacher education programs in each state.

Advanced Standing for Education Programs

Many U.S. teaching and education programs have options to apply foreign education for credit and advanced standing.

Note: *A credential evaluation can validate your international education to help you gain transfer credit or advanced standing.*

Maintaining Your Professional Certification

As with other regulated professions, certified teachers and school administrators must complete a minimum amount of professional development training to maintain their certificates or licenses. Professional development for teachers can take the form of both formal and informal events and programs, such as teacher conferences, college courses, seminars, and workshops.

LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS IN EDUCATION

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

Teacher Licensing and Certification

Because each U.S. state certifies its own teachers, the requirements to teach vary from state to state. Licensing and certification requirements also vary for different specializations. Contact your state's **regulatory body**²⁹ for more information on specific requirements.

See the **Teacher Certification Map**³⁰ for state-specific requirements.

- School-level (K-12) public school teaching **is a regulated profession** in every U.S. state and territory. Teachers may be certified in one or more subjects, by grade level, and hold administrative certificates.
- Postsecondary teaching **is not a regulated profession** in the United States—professional standards are set by the disciplinary or professional association in the faculty member's field.
- Recognition of teacher credentials from other U.S. states is often limited, time-consuming, and difficult to navigate. Recognition of non-U.S. teaching qualifications is rare. Because there is no nationally-recognized credential evaluation service or recognition process for teachers or school administrators, check with your individual state boards for guidance.



If you want to work in a public school as a teacher, you must have a teaching license or certificate.

Although public schools generally require all teachers to be certified, you may qualify for some teaching jobs without a teacher's license or certification in certain public charter or private schools. College professors and other academic faculty do not have to be certified.

- Licensing takes time. Make sure to plan sufficient time for this process.

Steps to Certification

Generally, as an internationally trained teacher seeking certification in the U.S., you must:

- have a foreign equivalent of a U.S. undergraduate degree
 - Most states also require a **credential evaluation report**³¹ from a credential evaluation service designated by your state, explaining your foreign credentials to the agency responsible for the license or certificate.
- complete a teacher preparation program that meets the requirements of the state where you want to teach
- complete the required number of university-level credit hours in education and in the subject area you would like to teach
- pass certification tests, such as the widely used **PRAXIS**³² test and other examination requirements specific to your state

Once you are certified, you are initially qualified to teach in that state's public schools. Most certificates are granted on a "provisional" basis and are only valid for a certain amount of time – usually from three to five years. To qualify for a "permanent" certificate, each state has additional renewal requirements.

Interstate Licensing Agreements: Working in Other States

The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (**NASDTEC Interstate Agreement**³³) is a collection of over 50 individual agreements by states and Canadian provinces that facilitates the movement of educators among participating states and jurisdictions.

- Each individual agreement outlines which other states' teaching certificates will be accepted in a particular state or jurisdiction.
- Although additional conditions may apply to individual jurisdictions, the Agreement makes it possible for an educator who completed an approved program or who holds a certificate or license in one jurisdiction to more easily earn a certificate or license in another state or jurisdiction.

Alternative Routes to Teaching Certifications

Several **alternative pathways** toward teaching certification or licensure are available to you as an internationally educated professional.

- Most states offer **Alternative Routes for Teacher Certification programs**³⁴ for individuals without a traditional teaching degree from an accredited college or university. These programs offer opportunities to work as a teacher while completing courses to obtain teaching credentials or licensure. Alternative Routes often take prior teaching experience into account, allowing for faster completion of the program.
- Some states offer transitional certificates targeted to individuals who are changing careers.
- Consult with your state board for **requirements to enter alternative programs**³⁵ and options available to you in the state where you wish to teach.

Find out more about the **Washington State's Educator Pathways**³⁶ offering alternative certification paths for teachers.

Other Certifications: Early Childhood Teachers, Daycare Workers

Some states require early childhood education teachers and daycare workers to obtain the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential offered by the **Council for Professional Recognition**.³⁷

- Obtaining the CDA credential requires coursework, experience in the field, a written exam, and observation of the candidate working with children. The CDA credential is valid for three years and requires renewal.

Some states recognize the Certified Childcare Professional (CCP) designation offered by the **National Early Childhood Program Accreditation**.³⁸

- The CCP accreditation requires renewal every two years through the CCP maintenance process.

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 latest and most authoritative guidance.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AND USING THEM IN RELATED OR ALTERNATIVE CAREERS

Transferable Skills

Many immigrants find that they may not be qualified for the same job they had in their home country because job titles and requirements in their field are different in the United States. On account of a lengthy licensing process or a need for immediate employment, they may pursue other options that use their training and experience.



The key to finding alternative paths to a fulfilling career is to identify your *skills* (what you know how to do), *knowledge* (what you know), *competencies* (what you are good at), and *aptitudes* (what is easy for you to learn) that 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 are from 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 specialized vocabulary, to a completely different career.

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:

- active listening
- managing multiple tasks at once
- critical thinking
- learning strategies
- public speaking
- instructing

GLOSSARY

Transferable skills: Skills developed in one situation or occupation which can be transferred to another context.

Related and Alternative Careers in Education

Why consider a different career? Finding employment in a related or alternative job can:

- open doors to new career possibilities
- provide income while you work toward your license
- grow your **professional network** in the United States
- help you gain American work experience

If you have spent many years committed to an occupation, 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 at having to explore a **new career path**.³⁹ In the United States, 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.

Case Study: Issouf



Issouf was born and raised in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. He attended the University of Koudougou, where he completed a teacher training program. He taught at a high school for a few years but decided to immigrate to America with his wife to start a family. In 2014, he moved to Boston and contacted an immigrant services agency to see if he could continue teaching. Issouf learned that the relicensing process to teach would be very costly, and sought alternative work that matched his background and skills. Currently, Issouf is working with a nonprofit in Boston as a case manager for homeless youth and uses his multilingual and teaching skills to help his clients.

GLOSSARY

Professional network: Relationships and acquaintances with whom you stay in contact based on professional rather than personal connections.

Examples of Related Careers

Some careers in education do not require you to be licensed or certified. These are ideal options for internationally trained educators who want to continue working in the field but do not want to undergo the relicensing process, or who want to work while relicensing in the United States.

Training and Development Specialist⁴⁰

- develop training programs that may take place in a classroom or online
- work in nearly every industry, sometimes embedded in a company's Human Resources Department

In addition to a bachelor's degree, training and development specialists also need work experience and strong communication skills.

Preschool and Daycare Center Director⁴¹

- perform administrative duties including managing staff and establishing goals, curriculum and daily routine
- ensure licensing regulations and safety standards are being maintained

A college degree and experience in early childhood education is typically required to become a preschool and childcare center director.

Instructional Coordinator⁴²

- oversee school curriculums and teaching standards
- prepare instructional material, coordinate its implementation, and evaluate its effectiveness

A master's degree and related experience are usually required to become an instructional coordinator.

For additional alternative careers in education, see [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)⁴³ for a list of similar and alternative occupations.

Examples of Alternative Careers

Alternative careers are careers outside of the field of education in which you can use the skills, experience, and knowledge you gained as a teacher.

Consider these types of careers if you are interested in exploring a different career path.

Education Policy Analyst/Research Associate

- examine a wide range of projects from early childhood development to adult education
- review research documents and proposals
- make policy recommendations
- work closely with education stakeholders to negotiate relevant research questions

Independent Reading Specialist

- teach targeted literacy interventions to individual students and small groups of students using research-based strategies and resources
- work with classroom teachers and school administration to facilitate the coordination of reading programs

Social Service or Community Service Manager

- coordinate and supervise social service programs and community organizations
- work with members of the community and other stakeholders to identify necessary programs and services

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? Why? Where? When?	How much? How often? How many?	Can it be done?	Is it relevant to your ultimate vision?	When?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

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

Educational Resources

- **50 States' Certification Requirements**⁴⁴ provides contact information of state boards and education requirements in each state. Some of these have information for teachers from outside the United States or who have non-U.S. qualifications.
- **The National Center for Alternative Certification**⁴⁵ provides information and guidance about alternative, transitional routes to teacher certification in the U.S.
- **American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence**⁴⁶ offers a state-approved route to full teacher certification in Florida, Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, Nevada, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah.
- **Reciprocity Across U.S. States**⁴⁷ explains how a teaching certificate obtained in one state may be eligible for teaching in another state, depending on state-specific regulations.
- The **National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)**⁴⁸ accredits schools, colleges, and departments of education in U.S. colleges and universities, as well as non-university entities that prepare educators.
- **The Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC)**⁴⁹ accredits undergraduate and graduate professional education programs in order to assure the public about the quality of college and university programs.
- **Financial relief**,⁵⁰ or “loan forgiveness,” may be available if you plan to teach in certain subjects or in designated low-income schools. Many states also offer their own financial incentives to attract talented people to teaching. You can search loans at the **American Federation of Teachers Funding Database**.⁵¹

Career/Employment Resources

- **Six Steps to Landing Your First Teaching Job**⁵² offers advice on securing teaching jobs during an economic downturn.
- **Career Resources for Teachers**⁵³ offers sample resumes and cover letter writing tips for teachers.
- **National Association for Bilingual Education**⁵⁴ is the only national professional organization in the U.S. devoted to representing Bilingual Learners and Bilingual Education professionals. NABE has affiliates in 20 states that collectively represent more than 5,000 members, including Bilingual and English Language Learner (ELL) teachers.

- **National Education Association (NEA)**,⁵⁵ the largest professional interest group in the United States representing public school teachers and other support personnel, provides a map of local NEA state affiliates across the U.S.
- **National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities**⁵⁶ is a federally funded technical assistance and dissemination project to increase the nation's capacity to recruit, prepare, and retain highly qualified special educators.
- **Association for Career and Technical Education**⁵⁷ is the largest national education association dedicated to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for successful careers.

Licensing Resources

- **National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC)**⁵⁸ provides information on teacher certification authorities in its State Contacts directory.
- **The NASDTEC Interstate Agreement**⁵⁹ facilitates the movement of educators among the states and other jurisdictions that are members of NASDTEC and have signed the Agreement.
- **Upwardly Global's Professional Licensing Guides**⁶⁰ can help you understand the necessary steps to continue your career in California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and New Hampshire.

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Our Expertise. Your Success.



WES Global Talent Bridge is a program dedicated to helping skilled immigrants fully utilize their talents and education in the United States. Global Talent Bridge joins with institutional partners and community organizations to help skilled immigrants leverage their training, achieve their professional goals, and contribute their talents to their full potential.

Global Talent Bridge provides technical assistance, staff training and specialized resources to community organizations, adult education programs, government agencies and academic institutions so they can better support, advise and integrate highly-qualified immigrants. It also conducts research and policy advocacy efforts to advance opportunities for skilled immigrants at the local, state and national level.

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Several overlapping, wavy green lines that sweep across the bottom of the page, creating a modern, abstract design element.