

K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Kentucky

Education Guide

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



Find Your Community
2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Kentucky.

This guide profiles **Kentucky'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 KENTUCKY

Kentucky educates roughly 640,000 public K–12 students across about 171 school districts (mostly county-based, plus some independent city districts), overseen by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the Kentucky Board of Education. Kentucky is distinctive for what its constitution doesn't allow: after courts struck down a...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ **Start age** — 6 (by October 1)
- ✓ **End of compulsory age** — 18
- ✓ **Districts** — ~171 (mostly county-based)
- ✓ **Satisfying it** — Public, private, or homeschool

PRE-K IN KENTUCKY

Kentucky does not offer a universal pre-K program. The state-funded Kentucky Preschool Program serves income-eligible 4-year-olds (and 3- and 4-year-olds with disabilities) through local school districts, alongside Head Start and child-care assistance for eligible families. Private preschools serve many families. Because state pre-K is...



AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 6–18
Districts	~171
Testing	KSA · ACT
Diploma	Credits + qualifiers
Choice	Public only

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

Kentucky's largest districts include Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) in Louisville — by far the state's largest — Fayette County (Lexington), and suburban districts such as Boone , Kenton , and Warren . A notable point: although Kentucky passed a charter-school law , the funding mechanism was ruled unconstitutional — so, as a...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN KENTUCKY

- ✓ **Catholic & parochial schools** — A large network across the Archdiocese of Louisville and dioceses statewide (such as Trinity, St. Xavier, Sacred Heart, and Assumption)
- ✓ **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools such as Louisville Collegiate School, Kentucky Country Day, and the Sayre School (Lexington)
- ✓ **Other religious schools** — Christian and other faith-based schools
- ✓ **Specialty schools** — Montessori and schools for specific learning needs

READ KENTUCKY'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Kentucky uses the KSA (Kentucky Summative Assessment) in grades 3–8 and the ACT in grade 11. Run by the Kentucky Department of Education and aligned to the Kentucky Academic Standards. There's no exit-exam gate.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- ✓ **KSA (grades 3–8)** — Reading and mathematics each year; science, social studies, and writing (editing/mechanics and on-demand writing) at designated grades
- ✓ **ACT (grade 11)** — The statewide high-school test — a real, college-usable score
- ✓ **Alternate K-Screen/Alt assessment** — For eligible students

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

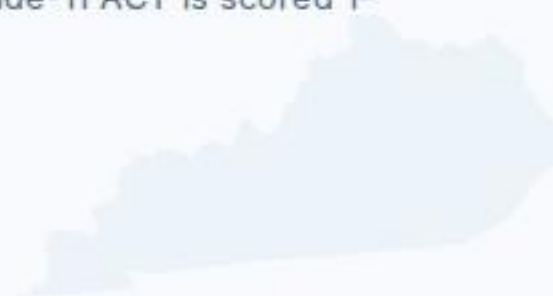
KSA is online with varied item types; the grade-11 ACT follows the national ACT format.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit-exam gate. Kentucky doesn't require passing a state test to graduate; students meet a graduation qualifier and complete course/credit requirements. The grade-11 ACT provides a college-usable score.

HOW IT'S SCORED

KSA reports performance levels (Novice, Apprentice, Proficient, Distinguished); the grade-11 ACT is scored 1–36.



AT A GLANCE

Grades 3–8	KSA
Subjects	Reading, Math, Science, Soc. Stu...
High school	ACT (grade 11)
Grad requirement?	No exit-exam gate
Format	Online
Standards	Kentucky Academic Standards

TESTING WINDOWS

KSA and the ACT are given in a spring window set by each district.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **ACT prep for grade 11** — Our ACT guide and free official ACT practice apply
- ✓ **KSA practice** — KDE provides released items matching the online format

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades participate. Ask your district about make-up windows.

ACCOMMODATIONS & MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Accommodations follow a student's IEP or 504 plan ; eligible students take the state's alternate assessment. Multilingual learners take an English proficiency test (WIDA ACCESS or the state equivalent) and may receive designated supports.

READ KENTUCKY'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Kentucky requires a state minimum of 22 credits , plus "graduation qualifiers" — students must demonstrate basic competency in reading and math through the state assessment or approved alternatives.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Kentucky's 22-credit minimum includes 4 English, 3 math, 3 science, 3 social studies, 1 health/PE, 1 arts, and electives (with financial literacy embedded). Districts may require more.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

Kentucky requires students to meet graduation qualifiers : demonstrating competency in reading and math via the state assessment or an alternative demonstration (retake, coursework, or other approved evidence). It's a competency requirement with multiple ways to meet it, not a single pass-or-fail exit exam.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Kentucky issues a standard diploma, with the Seal of Biliteracy available. Strong records support KEES scholarship eligibility (see KY financial aid).

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

The alternative demonstrations of competency give students multiple ways to meet the graduation qualifiers.



AT A GLANCE

Credits	22 (state minimum)
Also	Graduation qualifiers (reading &...
Demonstrate	Via state test or alternatives
Not a strict	Pass-or-fall exit exam
Confirm with	Your district

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Kentucky embeds financial literacy and requires an Individual Learning Plan. Confirm details with your district.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How many credits does Kentucky require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- ✓ **Does Kentucky require a test to graduate?** — There's no single exit exam, but students must meet reading/math graduation qualifiers (via the state test or alternatives).
- ✓ **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- ✓ **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ KENTUCKY'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Kentucky rates schools with a color and star system (five levels) on the Kentucky School Report Card , rather than a letter grade.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

Kentucky assigns an overall rating shown as a color and star level : blue (very high, 5), green (high), yellow (medium), orange (low), and red (very low) . It's based on proficiency, separate academic indicators (like science/social studies/writing), growth (elementary/middle), graduation rate, readiness, English-learner progress, and...

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	Color/star rating (5 levels)
Colors	Blue (highest) – Red (lowest)
Tool	Kentucky School Report Card
Look up at	kyschoolreportcard.com

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on the Kentucky School Report Card (kyschoolreportcard.com) . Review the indicator ratings (especially growth/readiness) and the trend, not just the color.

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 KENTUCKY'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Kentucky does not currently have a private-school-choice program. The state's courts had blocked earlier attempts (finding them inconsistent with the constitution), and a 2024 ballot amendment that would have allowed public funds for private schooling failed . Kentucky offers public choice (open enrollment; a charter-school framework).

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

There is no active ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship for private school in Kentucky. Prior programs were struck down by the state Supreme Court, and voters rejected a 2024 constitutional amendment (Amendment 2) that would have permitted them. Families seeking a private school pay tuition (with financial aid often available).

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

Because the 2024 amendment failed , private-choice programs remain constitutionally blocked in Kentucky. Confirm the current status if you've heard of a new development.



AT A GLANCE

Private choice?	No — amendment failed (2024)
Background	Courts blocked prior programs
Public choice	Open enrollment; charter law
Homeschool	Legal
Confirm with	Your district

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **Does Kentucky have a private-school-choice program?** — No — Kentucky has no private-choice program; courts blocked prior efforts and a 2024 amendment failed.
- ✓ **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 KENTUCKY'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Kentucky certifies teachers through the Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) . You complete an approved program, pass the required Praxis exams, and earn a Provisional Certificate , later a Professional Certificate (after the Kentucky Teacher Internship, where applicable).

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- ✓ **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your certification area
- ✓ **Praxis PLT** — Principles of Learning and Teaching (pedagogy) for your grade band
- ✓ **Note** — Requirements vary by area — confirm your specific tests and scores

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	Kentucky EPSB
Content	Praxis Subject Assessments
Pedagogy	Praxis PLT
Certificate	Provisional — then Professional

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Kentucky, 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 Kentuckys agency and your current state

READ KENTUCKY'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Kentucky's state aid is administered by the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA), funded substantially by the state lottery. Its signature program, KEES, rewards high-school performance year by year.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- ✓ **College Access Program (CAP) Grant** — Kentucky's main need-based grant — file the FAFSA early, as funds run out.
- ✓ **Kentucky Tuition Grant (KTG)** — Need-based aid for students at private, nonprofit Kentucky colleges.
- ✓ **Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship** — Tuition-free certificates/associate degrees in high-demand fields.

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- ✓ **Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES)** — Merit money earned by your GPA each year of high school (plus an ACT/SAT bonus), usable at Kentucky colleges — you earn more with higher grades.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Kentucky's KY Saves 529 is the state's tax-advantaged college-savings plan.

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.

AT A GLANCE

Merit	KEES (from HS GPA + ACT)
Need-based	CAP Grant
Private colleges	Kentucky Tuition Grant
Workforce	Work Ready KY Scholarship
529 plan	KY Saves
Agency	KHEAA

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- ✓ **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- ✓ **Register with Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority** — 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

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How do I get Kentucky state aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority administers the programs.
- ✓ **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Kentucky offers need-based grants and merit scholarships.
- ✓ **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- ✓ **Can I use it out of state?** — Most Kentucky aid is for in-state schools; check each program.
- ✓ **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official state programs only.

READ KENTUCKY'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
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