

K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



New Jersey 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 New Jersey.

This guide profiles **New Jersey'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 JERSEY

New Jersey educates roughly 1.4 million public K–12 students across about 600 school districts — one of the highest district counts in the nation, reflecting the state's strong "home rule" tradition (including many small elementary-only districts, regional high school districts, and county vocational districts). Public education is...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ **Start age** — 6 (by October 1)
- ✓ **End of compulsory age** — 16
- ✓ **Districts** — ~600 — among the most in the nation
- ✓ **Satisfying it** — Public, nonpublic, or homeschool

ABBOTT PRESCHOOL & UNIVERSAL PRE-K

New Jersey is a national leader in high-quality preschool . Its landmark Abbott Preschool Program — established by the 1998 Abbott v. Burke Supreme Court rulings to serve all 3- and 4-year-olds in the state's lowest-income districts — set what are widely regarded as the nation's highest preschool standards : certified teachers with...



AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 6–16
Districts	~600
Testing	NJSLA · NJGPA
Diploma	120 credits
Choice	Interdistrict

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

New Jersey's largest districts include Newark (the state's largest), Jersey City, Paterson, Elizabeth, and Toms River — but the state's ~600 districts include many small ones. New Jersey has a significant charter-school sector concentrated in its cities: charters serve a large share of students in Newark (roughly a third), and Camden...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN NEW JERSEY

- ✓ **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools — including boarding schools (The Lawrenceville School, Peddie School) and day schools (Pingry, Newark Academy...
- ✓ **Catholic & parochial schools** — A very large network across the Archdiocese of Newark and dioceses statewide (such as the Benedictine Delbarton, Seton Hall Prep, and St. Peter's...
- ✓ **Other religious schools** — An extensive Jewish day-school network (including in Lakewood), plus Christian, Quaker, and other faith-based schools
- ✓ **Specialty schools** — Montessori and schools for specific learning needs

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



State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

New Jersey uses the NJSLA (New Jersey Student Learning Assessment) in grades 3–9 for ELA and math, plus NJSLA-Science , and the NJGPA (New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment) in grade 11. The NJGPA is a graduation requirement — but students can meet it through alternatives if they don't reach the NJGPA cut score. All are run by the...

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- ✓ **NJSLA-ELA & Math** — English language arts and mathematics in grades 3–9
- ✓ **NJSLA-Science** — Science in grades 5, 8, and 11
- ✓ **NJGPA (grade 11)** — The graduation proficiency assessment in ELA and math
- ✓ **DLM alternate assessment** — For eligible students; ACCESS for ELLs for multilingual learners

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

NJSLA and NJGPA are online with multiple-choice and constructed-response items. NJGPA is a grade-11 test of ELA and math graduation proficiency.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

Yes. To graduate, students must demonstrate proficiency in ELA and math — by meeting the cut score on the NJGPA , or through an alternative : qualifying scores on the SAT, ACT, PSAT, Accuplacer, or other approved measures, or a portfolio appeal . Districts also set course and credit requirements.



AT A GLANCE

Grades 3–9	NJSLA (ELA & Math)
Science	NJSLA-Science gr 5, 8, 11
High school	NJGPA (grade 11)
Grad requirement?	Yes — NJGPA or alternative
Format	Online
Standards	NJ Student Learning Standards

HOW IT'S SCORED

NJSLA reports performance levels (1–5, with Level 4+ meeting expectations). NJGPA reports whether a student is "Graduation Ready" in ELA and math or needs an alternative.

TESTING WINDOWS

NJSLA is given in a spring window ; NJGPA is given to grade 11 in spring (with retake/alternative options). Exact dates are set by the state and district.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Released items & practice** — NJDOE provides practice tests and tutorials matching the online format
- ✓ **Course-aligned learning** — NJSLA and NJGPA test the NJ Student Learning Standards
- ✓ **Know your options** — If the NJGPA is a challenge, learn which alternative pathway (SAT/ACT/etc.) fits

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



Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

New Jersey requires 120 credits and is one of the few states that still requires a graduation assessment — the NJGPA . Students must demonstrate proficiency in ELA and math (or use an approved alternative).

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The 120-credit requirement includes 4 English, 3 math (through Algebra I, Geometry, and a third), 3 science (including lab biology), 3 social studies, 1 world language, 1.5 health/PE, 1 visual/performing arts, 1 financial literacy (21st-century life/careers), and electives.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

Yes — students must demonstrate proficiency on the New Jersey Student Learning Assessment / NJGPA in ELA and math. Students who don't meet the score can use alternative assessments (such as SAT, ACT, PSAT, or a portfolio appeal).

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

New Jersey issues a state-endorsed diploma, with the Seal of Biliteracy available. Districts may add honors.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

The alternative/substitute assessments and a portfolio appeal give students who don't pass the NJGPA other ways to meet the requirement.



AT A GLANCE

Credits	120
Exit exam?	Yes — NJGPA (ELA & math)
Alternatives	SAT/ACT/etc. concordant scores
Also	Financial literacy required
Confirm with	Your district

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

New Jersey requires financial literacy and 21st-century life/career coursework. Confirm specifics with your district.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How many credits does New Jersey require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- ✓ **Does New Jersey require a test to graduate?** — Yes — you must demonstrate proficiency on the NJGPA (or an approved alternative like the SAT/ACT).
- ✓ **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 NEW JERSEY'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

New Jersey publishes detailed School Performance Reports for every school and identifies lower-performing schools for support under ESSA — rather than assigning a single letter grade or star rating.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

New Jersey's reports show a wide range of performance data (achievement, growth, graduation, college/career readiness, climate, and more), and the state assigns ESSA designations (CSI, TSI, ATSI) to schools needing support. Most schools carry no negative designation. Read the data and any designation together.

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

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on the NJ School Performance Reports (rc.doe.state.nj.us) . Because there's no single grade, read across the indicators and note the trend and any support designation.



AT A GLANCE

Format	School Performance Reports (dash...
Designations	ESSA CSI/TSI/ATSI
No	Single grade or stars
Tool	NJ School Performance Reports
Look up at	rc.doe.state.nj.us

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)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How does New Jersey rate schools?** — New Jersey uses detailed School Performance Reports plus ESSA designations — not a letter grade or stars.
- ✓ **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- ✓ **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- ✓ **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- ✓ **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

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



School Choice

AT A GLANCE

New Jersey does not have a statewide private -school-choice program. It does offer public choice, notably the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program (attend a participating public school in another district, tuition-free) and charter schools.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

There is no ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship for private school in New Jersey (an "Opportunity Scholarship" has been proposed but not enacted). 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

Private-choice proposals appear periodically in New Jersey 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	Interdistrict School Choice + ch...
Interdistrict	Attend a participating out-of-di...
Homeschool	Legal
Confirm with	Your district

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **Does New Jersey have a private-school-choice program?** — No — New Jersey has no private program, but offers Interdistrict Public School Choice and charters.
- ✓ **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 JERSEY'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

New Jersey issues certificates through the New Jersey Department of Education . You typically earn a Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing (CEAS) or a Certificate of Eligibility (CE) , teach under provisional status, and then receive a Standard Certificate . New Jersey uses the Praxis .

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- ✓ **Praxis Subject Assessments** — The content test(s) for your certification area
- ✓ **Basic skills** — Praxis Core (or satisfied via GPA / qualifying SAT/ACT/GRE) — confirm current options
- ✓ **Note** — New Jersey has revised some requirements (including performance assessments) — 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	New Jersey Department of Educatl...
Subject	Praxis Subject Assessments
Basic skills	Praxis Core or qualifying GPA/sc...
Certificate	CE / CEAS — then Standard

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In New Jersey, 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)...

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 Jerseys agency and your current state

READ NEW JERSEY'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
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Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

New Jersey offers some of the nation's most generous state aid , administered by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) . Its cornerstone is the need-based Tuition Aid Grant (TAG) , complemented by free-community-college and tuition-free upper-year programs. Undocumented students may apply via the NJ Alternative...

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- ✓ **Tuition Aid Grant (TAG)** — New Jersey's flagship need-based grant for full-time residents at eligible in-state colleges.
- ✓ **Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF)** — Grants and support for students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) makes community college tuition-free for eligible residents; the Garden State Guarantee can cover the third and fourth years tuition-free at public four-year colleges for eligible students; and NJ STARS offers top high-school students free community college.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

New Jersey's NJBEST 529 College Savings Plan is the state's tax-advantaged plan (with a NJBEST scholarship benefit).



AT A GLANCE

Need-based	Tuition Aid Grant (TAG)
Free community college	Community College Opportunity Gr...
Free jr/sr year	Garden State Guarantee
Top HS students	NJ STARS
529 plan	NJBEST
Agency	HESAA

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- ✓ **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- ✓ **Register with HESAA** — 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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